

FREE DELIVERY OF RURAL MAILS.

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RAPID GROWTH OF RURAL FREE DELIVERY.

The system of free delivery of mail at the farm homestead is developing in the United States by great strides. It is commonly known as "Rural free delivery." The first routes bearing this name were established on October 1, 1896, at Halltown, Uvilla, and Charlestown, W. Va. Others followed at once, and by the close of the fiscal year the experiment showed satisfactory results. There were 44 routes in the fall of 1897; this number increased to 128 in 1898, and on November 1, 1899, had jumped to 634. These radiated from 383 distributing points and served a population of 452,735 persons. On June 30, 1900, a little more than six months later, the number of routes had grown to 1,214 for a population of 879,127, and in the next four months the system again more than doubled its proportions, showing on November 1, 1900, 2,551 routes for 1,801,524 persons; and there were also at that date 2,158 applications for the establishment of new routes.¹ The whole of the United States is now laid out in four divisions for the inauguration and maintenance of this service, and the work is going forward with steadily increasing volume. (See figs. 73 and 74.)

President McKinley in his message to Congress of December 3, 1900, states that "the number of applications now pending and awaiting action nearly equals all those granted up to the present time, and by the close of the current fiscal year about 4,000 routes will have been established, providing for the daily delivery of mails at the scattered homes of about three and a half million of rural population." The President describes this as the most striking new development of the postal service, which "ameliorates the isolation of farm life, conduces to good roads, and quickens and extends the dissemination of general information." He adds that "experience thus far has tended to allay the apprehension that it would be so expensive as to forbid its general adoption or make it a serious burden; its actual application has shown that it increases postal receipts, and can be accomplished by reductions in other branches of the service, so that the augmented revenues and

¹ The applications for new routes on March 1, 1901, numbered 4,517. The figures, by States, are given in the Appendix to this Yearbook.

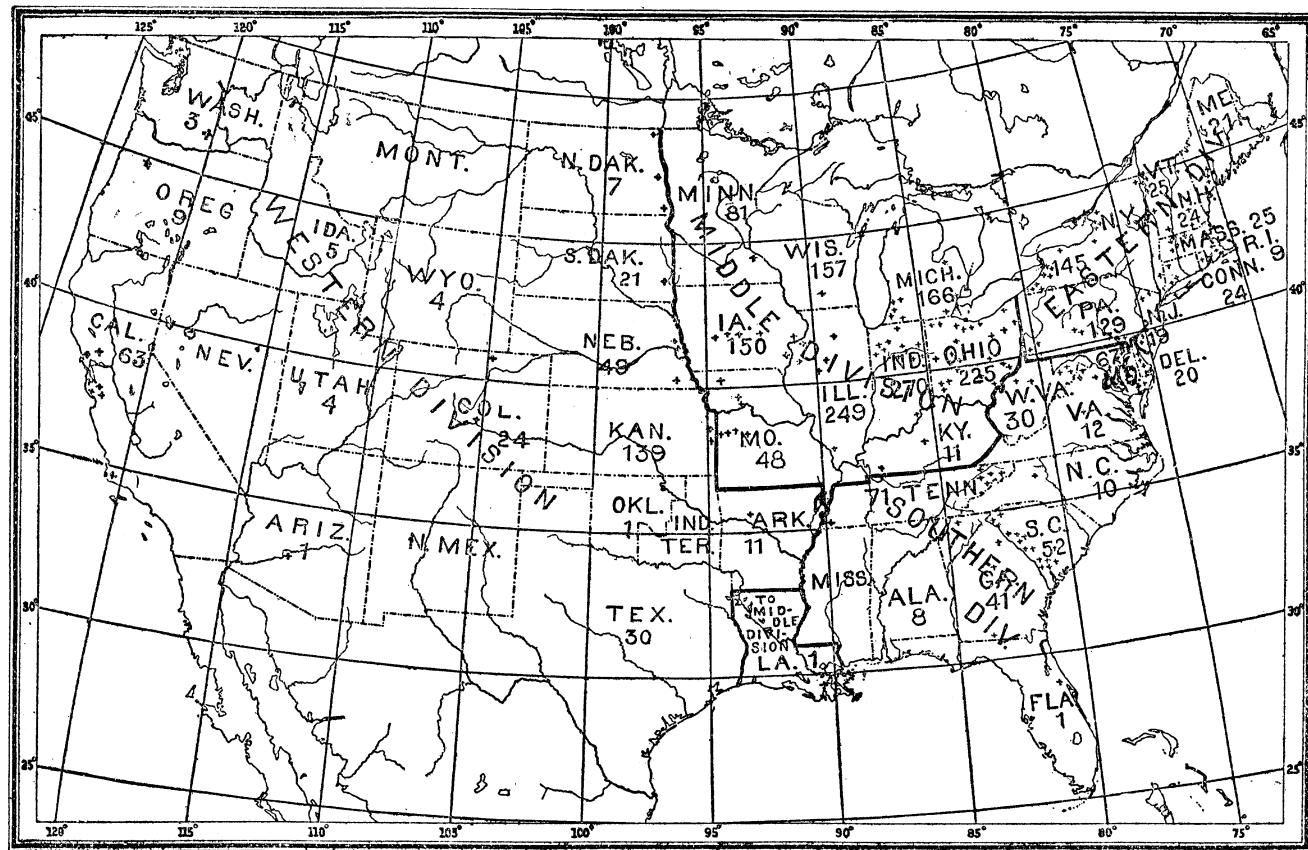


Fig. 74.—Rural free-delivery routes November 1, 1899, indicated by crosses (+); large numerals give numbers of routes in each State on June 30, 1900.

the accomplished savings together materially reduce the net cost." All these results, the President says, "have come almost wholly within the last year."

The first appropriations for the service, \$10,000 for the fiscal year 1894, \$20,000 for 1895, and \$30,000 for 1896, were not used. Subsequent appropriations have been as follows: For 1897, \$40,000; for 1898, \$50,000; for 1899, \$150,000; for 1900, \$450,000; for 1901, \$1,750,000. The Post-Office appropriation bill approved March 4, 1901, carries \$3,500,000 for this use in the fiscal year 1902.

HISTORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL FREE DELIVERY.¹

Undoubtedly the evolution of the rural free-delivery service as it now exists dates back to "village delivery" which Postmaster-General Wanamaker recommended in 1890. The service he inaugurated, however, was not a "rural" delivery, but an extension of the city delivery system by carriers on foot in towns with a less population than 10,000, or less gross postal receipts than \$10,000, the limit at which city delivery stops under existing law. The broad recommendations included in Mr. Wanamaker's report for an abandonment of the old colonial postal system (recently most aptly described by Postmaster-General Charles Emory Smith as a plan which "required the man to go for the mails, instead of the mails going to the man"), aroused public attention, and started an agitation in Congress and by the people for an extension of the free-delivery system into hitherto untried fields. When, on a change of Administration, the village-delivery experiment inaugurated on Postmaster-General Wanamaker's recommendation was ordered by Congress to be discontinued, after a brief experimental existence of little more than two years, the movement for free delivery on a broader basis was not suspended, but grew in intensity.

The new agitation took the form, not of a request for free delivery in villages where none of the patrons lived more than a mile or so from their village post office, but of a movement to give country delivery to farmers who lived from 2 to 12 miles from any post office, and who in consequence had to waste the best part of a day whenever they wished to mail a letter or expected to receive one, or desired to obtain a newspaper or magazine for which they had subscribed.

The State granges of Patrons of Husbandry took up the subject and brought strong pressure to bear upon Representatives in Congress from agricultural communities. Under these incentives a number of small appropriations were passed, but, as already stated, were not used. The prevailing sentiment, both in Congress and among the

¹ All data relating to the early history and development of the rural free delivery were supplied and revised by the Post-Office Department, to whose courtesy this acknowledgment is due.



FIG. 1.—RURAL DELIVERY IN SUMMER, NEAR JAMESTOWN, KANS.



FIG. 2.—RURAL DELIVERY IN WINTER, NEAR CONCORD, N. H.

executive officers of the Post-Office Department, as then constituted, was that the plan of rural free delivery was impossible of general adoption, and that it would cost at least \$20,000,000 a year to establish and maintain it.

CONGRESSIONAL ACTION.

Postmaster-General Wilson S. Bissell declined to make any use of the small appropriation of \$10,000 for experimental rural free delivery in 1894. His antagonistic views were concurred in by the Committee on the Post-Office and Post-Roads of the Fifty-third Congress, Hon. John S. Henderson, of North Carolina, being chairman. But many Representatives had become strongly interested in the project, and in spite of the committee's adverse report, the appropriation was doubled. Mr. Bissell, however, again refused to act, and it was not until after Hon. William L. Wilson became Postmaster-General that anything was done to comply with the directions of Congress. Mr. Wilson was appointed in the spring of 1895. In his first report he said that he had taken charge too late in the fiscal year to undertake the work. He agreed with his predecessor, Mr. Bissell, that the proposal was impracticable, but he added that if Congress chose to make the money available for the fiscal year 1897 he would inaugurate the experiment by the best methods he could devise. The response by Congress was a second doubling of the appropriation, putting \$40,000 at his disposal.

THE FIRST ROUTES ESTABLISHED.

Under this authorization, 44 routes were selected in widely differing localities in 29 States. The purpose was to make the experiment as general as possible, and to have the result represent the working of the system under as diverse conditions as possible. Fifteen routes were set going in October, 1896, 15 in November, 8 in December, 3 in January, and 1 each in February and April following. Some of these routes were in the foothills of the Alleghenies about Charlestown, W. Va., others on the prairies of Kansas and Nebraska (Pl. LXIII, fig. 1); some among the sugar plantations of Louisiana, others among the snow and ice of Grand Isle in Lake Champlain and on the wind-swept plains of Minnesota; some were in the populous old communities of northern Massachusetts and southwestern Maine, others among the fruit orchards of Arizona and the grass lands of southern Washington. The other States represented were Indiana, Ohio, Maryland, Missouri, Arkansas, Virginia, North Carolina, Colorado, Iowa, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Illinois, Tennessee, and California.

UNFAVORABLE CONDITIONS.

It was dead of winter before the work got fairly under way, so that the difficulties were practically at a maximum, except that of muddy roads, which would become more and more impassable as spring came on.

The officials who were intrusted with the inauguration of the service were often dissatisfied and unfavorably disposed toward the work, because they had to be detailed from their regular work in such a way as to hinder their probable promotion. Accordingly some of the first reports were quite discouraging.

The inspector who laid out the route at Hartsville, Ind., wrote that the people who were reached were not asking for delivery of their mails at their homes. Their correspondence was mainly social, not demanding promptness of delivery, and only farmers living near the post office took daily papers. "The importance of the average farmer's mail," he said, "is not such as to make rural free delivery essential." The fact that the farmers near the post office took daily papers seemed to give no intimation to this inspector that free delivery would cause farmers all along the route to do the same thing.

ADOPTION BY THE EXECUTIVE OF VIEWS FAVORABLE TO THE SYSTEM.

In consequence of the discouragements just referred to, the new service was so little known when Hon. Perry S. Heath became First Assistant Postmaster-General in March, 1897, that he learned with some surprise that a trial was actually being made of rural free delivery. He took charge of the administrative division to which the experiment belonged, and determined to go into the matter exhaustively. In contradiction of the unfavorable reports from some of the agents in charge of the work came good news from other agents, and the sentiment of farmers everywhere seemed favorable to a thorough test of the system. Congress was so well satisfied with the success so far attained that the appropriation for 1898 was made \$50,000.

Mr. Heath said in his second report to the Postmaster-General:

An examination of the reports on file led to the conclusion that great possibilities of social, industrial, and educational development lay behind the projected extension of postal facilities in rural communities, and that with proper care in the selection of localities, the service could be extended far and wide, with great benefit to the people and without any serious tax upon the revenues of the Government, inasmuch as the increase of postal business which had hitherto followed the granting of additional postal facilities in every well-selected rural route would go far toward the payment of the extra expense incurred, while the discontinuance of unnecessary post offices and star routes would in many cases make the improved service a source of saving instead of added outlay.

It was, of course, apparent that no accurate balance sheet of profit and loss could immediately be struck, inasmuch as no account could be kept of the saving effected by dispensing with the offices of postmasters of the fourth class, who are authorized by law to retain all their receipts up to the limit of \$1,000. Their receipts do not appear in the post-office returns. They are perquisites of the postmasters, to which they cling with natural tenacity. When, under the operations of rural free delivery, their cancellations are turned into the general postal revenues, the service thus rendered becomes an item of cost charged against the rural free delivery appropriation, but the saving effected can not be credited to that account. In like manner star-route service dispensed with makes a net saving to the Government, but goes to

the credit of another branch of the service, as star-route contractors are paid under an appropriation not supervised by the First Assistant Postmaster-General.

Petitions from every section of country where the service had been given a fair trial began to pour in upon the Department. Special agents were appointed to look into the claims presented and to lay out services wherever the conditions seemed favorable to an economical and successful administration. Such good results were obtained that Congress, responding to the demand of the people, appropriated \$150,000 for rural free delivery for the fiscal year 1897-98 [1898-99], and gave \$300,000 for the same purpose for the current fiscal year [1900]. The requests for the service multiplied like an endless chain, every new rural delivery route established bringing in three or more applications from contiguous territory for like privileges, and before four months of the present fiscal year had expired the appropriation was found to have been practically apportioned out, that is to say, the existing service, if continued to the close of the fiscal year, would require the disbursement of the whole amount appropriated by Congress. As I did not deem myself authorized to create a deficiency, even in so popular and important a work of postal development, a halt was reluctantly called in the installation of new rural free delivery service to await the further directions of the Congress.

OPPOSITION OF POSTMASTERS AND STAR-ROUTE CONTRACTORS.

It must not be supposed, however, that all opposition to rural free delivery ceased with the change of attitude on the part of the Post-Office Department. It was found by the special agents in charge of the establishment of new routes that considerable sentiment against the change of method was manifested in some communities where it was about to be made. In several cases petitions were sent to Congress making protest, but upon investigation it was found in most cases that this adverse feeling had been worked up in the interest of a fourth-class postmaster or a star-route contractor who was likely to be displaced by the new routes. In some cases the fear of the postmaster was supplemented by apprehension among his village neighbors that trade would go elsewhere. In many instances signers of petitions, when called upon, repudiated the views they had been induced to indorse. They had signed out of good will to their neighbors and with little attention to the meaning of the petition. When the question of free delivery was brought before them on its merits they had little to say in opposition, and when it was presented as a direct benefit to themselves they were active in preventing the choice of some other section than their own for the location of the next new route.

THE SYSTEM PUT TO A TEST.

Congress without hesitation supplied the additional funds called for by the unexpectedly rapid growth of the service, and the installation of new routes went speedily forward.

Up to this point the service had been fragmentary and detached. It was Postmaster-General Smith who developed the idea of putting the service to a test of practicability by extending rural delivery over

an entire county, superseding all other service, and then striking a balance sheet of profit and loss.

Four lines of investigation were laid down:

(1) To what extent can rural free delivery supersede fourth-class post offices and star routes.

(2) To what extent can it be used as a channel through which to extend to the farmer all other postal facilities, as money orders, etc.

(3) What will be the effect on the postal revenues.

(4) What the net cost to the Government as compared with that of the old system.

It seemed essential that such an experiment should be made in a strictly farming community, presenting many of the topographical and other physical conditions and obstacles likely to be encountered in a general introduction of the service elsewhere, so that its successful operation under such circumstances might be looked upon as a guaranty of its success in any other average rural locality in which it might be established.

THE CARROLL COUNTY SERVICE.

Carroll County, Md., was selected, with the third-class post office of Westminster as the distributing point. The results of the experiment are thus described in official reports of the Post-Office Department:

On December 20, 1899, when winter weather and snowstorms had put the roads in their worst condition, the practicability of establishing rural free delivery to extend over a wide area to the exclusion of all other service, was put to a test in Carroll County, Md. By order of the Postmaster-General, 63 minor post offices and 35 services by star-route contractors and mail messengers were discontinued, all in one day, and rural free delivery substituted in their place.

The Westminster service started with four 2-horse postal wagons, each equipped with all the appliances of a traveling post office, each accompanied by a postal clerk empowered to issue money orders, register letters, and deliver letters, and cancel stamps on letters collected. These wagons supplied mail at designated points to twenty rural carriers, for whom cross routes were laid out, so as to bring all the territory embodied in the order within easy reach of the mails. The initial service in Carroll County covered 387 square miles of the 453 square miles within the county limits. It has since been extended so as to cover the whole county and about 200 square miles of adjacent territory in Baltimore, Howard, Frederick, and Montgomery counties, Md., and York and Adams counties, Pa., this additional service being equivalent to ten ordinary rural free-delivery routes.

The total number of carriers employed is 45, and they, with the four wagon services, give a daily dispatch, as well as delivery, on every route except four, which are too far removed from railroads to be able to make connections the same day; but all letters from these points are dispatched early the following morning.

A detailed report of this service from the Superintendent of the Free Delivery System, under whose direct supervision the experiment was started, was laid before Congress on the 23d of April, 1900. It was shown by this report that during the first three months the cost of the service was \$4,543; the saving by service superseded was \$2,805; the increase of postal receipts directly resulting from the increased accommodation was \$1,501.75, thus leaving the net cost of carrying the postal service practically to, or near to, the homes of all the people in Carroll County for one-quarter of a year only \$263.



FIG. 1.—RURAL-DELIVERY CARRIER AT MINING CAMP ON MOUNTAIN ROUTE, BINGHAM CANYON, UTAH.



FIG. 2.—MAIL WAGON AND FARM MAIL BOXES AT DUNKARD CHURCH, NEAR DEFIANCE, OHIO.

OTHER COUNTY SERVICES.

County services on an almost equally broad scale have since been successfully inaugurated in Washington County, Tenn., Washington County, Pa., Fairfield County, Conn., and are in process of installation in other States.

IMPROVEMENTS, PHASES, AND INCIDENTS.

The practical test of rural free delivery gave rise to many problems, and some of these are even now only in process of settlement.

MAILS FOR MINING CAMPS.

Among others, was the question what could be done for mining camps and similar customers of the post office. When the service was started only the farming population was considered, but it was soon evident that in several Western States settlers on mineral lands ought not to be left out of the account. What has been actually done is to establish routes for such communities the same as in agricultural sections. (Pl. LXIV, fig. 1.) This service is maintained under a ruling of the Post-Office Department that the term "rural" means "communities not included in cities or incorporated villages, and does not necessarily imply that persons so situated should be engaged in farming in order to obtain the benefits of rural free delivery."

PROTECTION OF MAIL BOXES.

Another difficulty lay in the danger of loss of mail from boxes not directly owned by the Government and therefore completely under the protection of the statutes. It is not easy even under the most favorable conditions, to secure convictions of offenders against the Government; the lawyers for the defense in such prosecutions are prone to make use of any technicality and as a result, guilty persons often go clear. It was decided by the Department that boxes set up for farm delivery and accepted by the postal authorities as "secure and appropriate" should be regarded as within the application of the law forbidding any tampering with mails. There have been several cases of meddling with the free-delivery boxes, and one man has been held for trial in the United States courts. Further legislation has been asked of Congress so as to supply more convenient boxes to be owned by the Government and thus protected more certainly.

In comparing rural free delivery with the old system as regards safety of the mails, it must not be forgotten that abuses and carelessness are not infrequent at fourth-class post offices. At some places the mail sack is simply emptied on a table and each person hunts through it for his own mail.

REGISTERED MAIL, MONEY ORDERS, AND DROP LETTERS.

On April 12, 1900, an important advance took place. Rural carriers were authorized to receive and deliver registered mail. As the

law requires such matter to be delivered personally, the carriers are obliged to go to the houses instead of dropping the letters or packages in the farm box. Rural carriers are also authorized to receipt for applications for money orders, and while they can not yet issue the orders, they can save the farmer the trip to the office by acting as his agent.

Another most satisfactory change was made on July 26, 1900, when an order was made under which postage on drop letters on rural free-delivery routes was fixed at 2 cents per ounce and carriers were required to cancel stamps on all letters collected by them. This order carried with it authority to deliver drop letters without passing them through the hands of a postmaster.

ADAPTABILITY OF THE SERVICE.

The effort in the incipency of the institution of rural free delivery to put the matter to the test under as diverse conditions as possible resulted early in showing that the new way could be adapted to any section not altogether too sparsely settled. It was found possible to deliver the mails in the coldest winter of any part of this country and in the driest and hottest summer with very little interruption, scarcely more than occurs in cities by reason of snowdrifts and washouts on railways. When a heavy snow (Pl. LXIII, fig. 2) blocks the way of the rural carrier it is customary for the farmers to turn out and break the roads, and this is done several days earlier than would be the case ordinarily. In this way communication throughout neighborhoods and with the outside world is opened up promptly. In consequence the farmer is able to take advantage of good markets and the townspeople are not cut off from the supply of fresh country produce, as often has happened in severe storms. * Also cases of distress in isolated farm homes are sooner reached and relieved.

The carrier's outfit is modified to suit the conditions under which his work is done, a light vehicle (Pl. LXV, fig. 1) being used in one section while a heavier wagon is preferred in another. The Washington officials have been surprised at the rapidity of the growth of the system in remote and comparatively sparsely settled regions in the West and South (Pl. LXVI).

ADVANTAGES OF RURAL FREE DELIVERY.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS.

Rural free delivery of mails is scientific. On purely theoretical grounds the post office ought always to deliver the matter intrusted to it at the door of the addressee. The distance to be traveled from sender to receiver of mail is precisely the same whether the whole trip be made by the postal employee or he be met part way by the person for whom it is intended. Furthermore, the cost of making the trip is



FIG. 1.—LIGHT EQUIPMENT FOR RURAL DELIVERY, LOS GATOS, CAL.

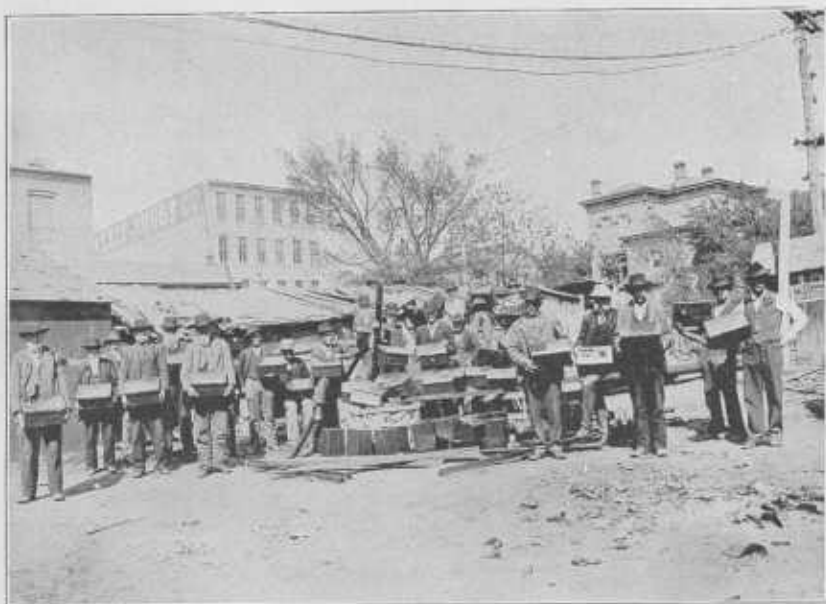


FIG. 2.—A CROWD OF FARMERS DEPARTING WITH THEIR BOXES FOR RURAL ROUTE AT ATTICA, IND.



MAIL WAGONS READY TO START, AT HILLSBORO, TEX.

always paid out of the sum total of the nation's capacity to do work. It makes little difference ultimately whether the labor is paid for from Government funds collected by the sale of stamps or otherwise, or is done by each man directly without intervention of the United States Treasury at all; it all comes from the people anyhow.

The only question that need be asked is whether there will be more waste of time, a larger number of empty trips by the farmer, who never knows when there is mail for him, or by the postman, who always knows whether there is something to deliver; and to this there seems to be but one answer. The number of times the farmer would be going to the post town for other reasons and the times when several families would send for mail by the same messenger enter into the calculation, of course, but in general this would not change the answer. And whether the addressee may be a farmer or townsman really is of no consequence, if free delivery involves only a short trip for the postman in the city, it also involves only a short trip for the citizen, and the corresponding relation between length of trips exists for the farm delivery.

THE OPINIONS OF FARMERS.

The views of farmers as to rural free delivery are strikingly illustrated by the reception of the opening of a new route at Attica, Ind., on May 12, 1900. (Pl. LXV, fig. 2.) It was the busiest season of the year, but a large number of farmers came in, some of them 10 to 15 miles to get farm boxes at \$2.60 apiece, so as to be ready for the carrier.

Further evidence of the general favor in which the system is held by farmers is found in hundreds of letters in answer to inquiries sent out by this Department. Only one in ten had any objection to offer, and frequently the objection was that the expense would be too great. In answer to this may be offered the demonstration on theoretical grounds that the real expense is much less under the new system. And more directly convincing is the demonstration by figures in the post-office reports that the cash outlay by the Government for rural free delivery is smaller than for a less desirable service through country post office and star route. The loss of work to the farming community in going to the post office for mail is shown to be absolute and total waste.

Of the letters from farmers, a few are here presented. They are selected so as to show as fully as practicable opinions of all kinds:

Jason Woodman, Paw Paw, Mich.: The daily delivery at his "place of business" of the farmer's letters, market reports, and daily paper are as essential to him as such things are to any business man. In my own case it saves hundreds of miles driving and days of time each year.

W. S. Jordan, North Manchester, Ind.: * * * After a trial of nearly a year we feel as though it would take away part of life to give it up.

E. D. Nauman, Thornburg, Iowa.: * * * It will greatly assist the farmer in a material and practical way by giving him the markets and United States weather forecasts daily. Of the two, I regard the weather forecasts fully as important as the markets. Under the old system the farmers, for whom to a large extent the weather bulletins are intended, do not see them with sufficient regularity to be of much value to them. And at that season of the year when the weather forecasts are of most value to the farmer (harvest time) he is too busy to visit the post office to either see the bulletin there displayed or to get his daily paper.

Jonathan B. Allen, Delavan, Ill.: * * * In November I sold 3,000 bushels of corn; there was a difference of 3 cents a bushel between the highest and lowest bid of six elevators that are located within 5 miles of me. I consider a farm on rural mail route worth 5 per cent more than a farm that is not.

W. D. H. Johnson, Holton, Ga.: * * * I would suggest that the carrier be required to carry the weather flags on his conveyance where the Weather Bureau has a signal station, as is the case at our starting point.

T. C. Badger, Smith Center, Kans.: * * * Perhaps the greatest advantage is in knowing the market prices each day. The buyers here use Kansas City markets as a basis for buying, and the farmers can be, and some of them are, just as well informed as anyone. I know of two that made the price of their daily paper on one load of hogs each. It is the forerunner of other deliveries [of grocers and the like] along the route.

W. M. Hilleary, Turner, Oreg.: * * * We have had the benefits of free rural mail delivery at Turner for more than three years. The farmers are well pleased with its benefits and pleasures. * * * Before free delivery was started there were 13 daily papers taken at Turner post office. To-day there are 113. This shows that the farmers are getting in touch with the world and are quick to avail themselves of all educational facilities. With the general extension of rural free mail delivery there will be less talk about the monotony of farm life and less desire of the boys and girls to get away from the farm. The only objectors are small retailers of merchandise and dealers in liquors and tobacco. It may injure the business of the latter, since many farmers do not drink or smoke, only when they go to the village; and their families get the benefit in more reading matter.

O. N. Cadwell, Carpinteria, Cal.: * * * It brings our daily papers promptly, so that saves us time and anxiety. The weather report is dropped in our box, and that is the first thing I look at, to see what it says about the weather to-morrow.

C. P. Waugh, Wellsburg, W. Va.: * * * We have three routes in this county that have been in operation for 18 months and are delivering mail every day to 1,275 persons. In the 18 months the increase in the amount of mail delivered and collected amounted to a little over 57 per cent. These 1,275 people live on an average about 2 miles from the office, and before the R. F. D. started only went for their mail about twice per week, and it required about one hour each week for each person to go for his mail; 1,275 hours per week, 66,300 hours per year, or 6,630 days of 10 hours each lost every year going for mail twice per week, and then not receiving half the benefits we do at the present time.

* * * By having plenty of good and cheap reading delivered at our doors every day free of charge it not only makes the farmers and their families read more, but it makes them think more.

J. S. Hollingsworth, Snacks, Ind.: * * * Here is a sample of the benefits: I get two dailies every morning. * * * On November 16, 1900, I saw a big jump in potato market. Next day I left a postal card in a United States box at the cross-roads for a farmer 3 miles distant to "hold your big potato crop; a jump is on the market; don't sell too soon." In two weeks from that date he sold 1,000 bushels at 20 cents above the October market.

Matthew Williams, Verndale, Minn.: As the whole world has been drawn closer together by the inventions and uses of steam and electricity, so farmers may be drawn closer together by the universal practice of free delivery.

State Senator Thomas J. Lindley, Ind.: * * * I can say with confidence that there is no other way in which the expenditure of a like sum of money brings as great good to so large a number of the people. The farmer on a rural route is in close and constant touch with the world. He no longer feels the isolation of country life. I think the system will contribute largely to prevent the threatened congestion of population in our cities and towns. I speak after two years' experience on a rural route 7 miles from town.

Frank L. Gerrish, Boscaawen, N. H.: * * * Some of the farmers got their eyes opened on the apple crop by taking papers they had not before, and made a nice thing by holding. These routes are not all they might be, but constant improvements will do much to help these back farms and keep them in touch with the near markets.

Postmaster Henry Robinson, Concord, N. H.: [At the request of Mr. Gerrish, Mr. Robinson sent letters praising the new system from 32 farmers, all living along routes radiating from that office.]

* * * If this State gets a fair allotment of the Congressional appropriation for rural free mail delivery during the fiscal year beginning July 1 next, the whole State of New Hampshire will be substantially covered, especially the principal highways, by the rural carrier service. The grangers in New Hampshire have made themselves its especial champions.

* * * The local system of rural free delivery centering at the Concord post office already comprises 26 contiguous routes. These routes, on an average, include 600 people each, which, together with the people of the city of Concord, who enjoy city and rural free delivery, include substantially 35,000 people, or more than one-half of the population of Merrimack County. These routes cover substantially 1,000 miles of highways. The rural carrier service in central New Hampshire now covers a tract of territory from the city of Franklin and the town of Salisbury, the birth-place of Daniel Webster, on the north, to the village of Litchfield, on the south, a distance of 50 miles, and from Pittsfield on the east to Henniker on the west, a distance of 34 miles.

* * * The impetus to the good-roads movement is very great, and the value of real estate generally throughout the delivery territory is increased.

G. L. Webster, Opelika, Ala.: * * * There are three routes out from this place. The first has been in operation for four years, the other two one year, and they have all proved eminently successful. * * * The amount of mail matter carried out on this route has more than doubled since their establishment, and many farmers are taking papers and getting daily crop reports that formerly only got this information once a week.

Z. Taylor Chrisman, Warwick, Pa.: * * * If rural free delivery must close our local post office and give us but one delivery a day and remove the post office so far from us that we can't go to it no matter how urgent, or should we receive a letter that required an immediate answer, it could not be answered until the next day, I can't see that it will benefit us.

Could not the Department with equal economy have a carrier from each local office distribute the mail daily, and we would still have our office, so that we could send or receive any additional mail?

John M. True, secretary State board of agriculture, Madison, Wis.: I am of the opinion that the most sanguine expectations of the friends of rural free delivery are to be more than realized. I am informed that upon lines established in my vicinity four months since the amount of mail handled has already largely increased, showing

a prompt disposition on the part of farmers to avail themselves of increased facilities for general reading, which means more intelligent ideas of business, periodicals, and social questions. It measurably removes the feeling of isolation that has been one of the great drawbacks to rural life.

The whole tendency of the system is to elevate the farmer, making him a broader, more refined, happier, and more useful citizen.

S. C. McDowell, Fox Lake, Wis.: * * * Rural free delivery will encourage the people to make better roads. It has already had an influence on the price of land, which has increased \$5 per acre already.

F. D. T. Hall, Lamberton, N. Y.: * * * Farmers who have all their lives been content with one or two mails a week declare they could not go back to the old way, but if the rural free delivery were to be taken away they would combine and employ a carrier at their own expense.

J. B. Cain, Aurora, Nebr.: * * * Living 9 miles from the post office, only getting our mail once or twice a week, then to have a mail route so we can take a daily, is a blessing that a few years ago was not dreamed of. Other cattle feeders as well as myself have driven hundreds of miles for reports of stock market that we now get daily.

William Schafer, Northcreek, Ohio: * * * I don't believe it will ever be a complete success. I have watched the working of it near us in Defiance County, Ohio. [Pl. LXIV, fig. 2.] It works all right along the routes where there are good roads, but those good roads are only a few, and I notice that the majority of citizens living at remote points have no accommodation; and again I see where parties go to town and right past the post office and could get their mail just the same. * * *

If the Government is inclined to do a good act for the mail service, let them extend the distance of special delivery. If a person in the country receives a letter of importance with a special-delivery stamp, if it is beyond the limit directed by law he doesn't get his letter.

REPORTS OF SPECIAL AGENTS OF THE POST OFFICE.

The opinions of special agents engaged in introducing free rural delivery in all parts of the United States, as shown in their reports in 1899 and 1900, are invariably favorable to the success of the system. All agree that the opposition comes only from persons interested in the mail service who think they are likely to lose by the change, and from small storekeepers and saloon keepers at fourth-class post offices. Some of them mention also as difficulties to be overcome the fact that the work has been generally spoken of as experimental, and the impossibility of serving all persons precisely alike. The following expressions fairly represent the views of the special agents. The first two are reports for 1899, the others for 1900:

A. B. Smith, Eastern Division: More letters are written and received; more newspapers and magazines read; more intelligence diffused; modern methods are employed on the farm, and better crops are harvested; rural life loses its loneliness and isolation dreaded by all; lands appreciate in value; abandoned farms are again occupied; congested centers find an outlet; inducements to speculation in the postal service are diminished; the service is placed abreast of the times and in accord with the business sentiment of the age.

Thomas Howard, St. Paul, Minn.: The free delivery service offers a solution of the very serious sociological and economic problem presented by the tendency of young

men and women residing in rural districts to gravitate toward the cities. I have noticed a distinct improvement in the habits and general moral tone of communities supplied with the service.

F. M. Dice, Middle Division: A great many of the localities have provided uniforms for the carriers by private donations, and have aided carriers to secure special wagons for the delivery of the mails, and are active in their efforts to obtain the best mail boxes for use on their routes.

William E. Annin, Western Division: In Iowa forty routes have been laid out in three Congressional districts during the last two months, all equipped with lock signal boxes erected on posts which are dressed, painted, and numbered. The influence of rural free delivery in stimulating the work for good roads has been powerful in not a few instances in securing appropriations for the bettering of roads, the building of bridges, the repair of culverts, and the maintenance of way.

Mr. A. W. Machen, Superintendent of the Free Delivery System, and Mr. H. Conquest Clarke, of the Southern Division, with general supervision at Washington of the rural service, concur in these views.

METHOD OF PROCEDURE IN STARTING NEW ROUTES.

In order to introduce rural free delivery on a new route, a petition must be circulated and signed showing the desire of the persons along the line for the new service. This paper is then forwarded to the Representative in Congress from the district in which the route will be located, or to one of the Senators from the State, for his recommendation. If it is deemed practicable to start the service as desired, a special agent of the Post-Office Department is sent to lay out a route and make a map of it. His report and map must show that at least 100 families can be made accessible to the delivery. It also shows the character of the roads, and the agent impresses upon the persons interested that the roads must be made passable summer and winter.

A full route is considered 25 miles, but according to the country traversed may vary from 17 to 35 miles. It does not take the carrier over the same ground twice in the same day.

Carriers were paid at first only \$150 a year. They now receive \$500 for an ordinary route and for special short routes \$100 a year for each 5 miles traveled. They are bonded, and each carrier has a bonded substitute, so that the mails may never lack a responsible carrier. The civil-service regulations have never been applied to this service, but good character and temperate habits are required. Women are acceptable, and a few are in the ranks, some of them considered very efficient. Reports to the Post-Office Department of dereliction of duty on the part of rural carriers are very few.

SUMMARY OF ADVANTAGES AND OBJECTIONS.

Postmaster-General Charles Emory Smith in his last report summarizes the results attained as follows:

Rural delivery has now been sufficiently tried to measure its effects. The immediate and direct results are clearly apparent. It stimulates social and business

correspondence, and so swells the postal receipts. Its introduction is invariably followed by a large increase in the circulation of the press and of periodical literature. The farm is thus brought into direct daily contact with the currents and movements of the business world. A more accurate knowledge of ruling markets and varying prices is diffused, and the producer, with his quicker communication and larger information, is placed on a surer footing. The value of farms, as has been shown in many cases, is enhanced. Good roads become indispensable, and their improvement is the essential condition of the service. The material and measurable benefits are signal and unmistakable.

But the movement exercises a wider and deeper influence. It becomes a factor in the social and economic tendencies of American life. The disposition to leave the farm for the town is a familiar effect of our past conditions. But this tendency is checked, and may be materially changed by an advance which conveys many of the advantages of the town to the farm. Rural free delivery brings the farm within the daily range of the intellectual and commercial activities of the world, and the isolation and monotony which have been the bane of agricultural life are sensibly mitigated. It proves to be one of the most effective and powerful of educational agencies. Wherever it is extended the schools improve and the civic spirit of the community feels a new pulsation; the standard of intelligence is raised, enlightened interest in public affairs is quickened, and better citizenship follows.

With all these results clearly indicated by the experiment as thus far tried, rural free delivery is plainly here to stay. It can not be abandoned where it has been established, and it can not be maintained without being extended.

The objections are: Fourth-class postmasters and star-route contractors are thrown out of some work, and the custom of large numbers of farmers is diverted from its former channels, a disturbance of business of indefinite proportions but of real consequence, yet soon remedied by a readjustment of relations; delay of mails of persons who have lived near enough to the country offices to send for mail early, but who are reached by the rural carrier only as he returns late in the day at the end of his route; and the impossibility of reaching very remote homesteads with rural carriers.

The balance in favor of rural free delivery is so great, the reception by farmers so enthusiastic, and the demands for its extension so widespread and urgent that the Post-Office Department now makes an estimate for it as no longer an experiment, and Congress in its liberal appropriations appears to have accepted this view, although the word "experimental" is still retained in the postal appropriation bill. The growth of the administrative work at Washington has been so great that additional room is now being provided for the force of employees.

The conditions shown justify the opinion more than once expressed by the Post-Office Department, that the United States must follow the lead of France, England, Germany, Austria, and other countries, whose closely settled lands sooner suggested it, and establish a free delivery service everywhere. It is already manifest that the service is in some respects superior to that of the older countries, and when it is fully developed and running smoothly Americans and foreigners will alike be surprised if it is not clearly superior in all its details.